

VICTORY OVER SIN – Realizing Our Potential in Christ (Part-thirteen of a sixteen-part study)

The dictionary defines the word “potential” in the following way: “existing in possibility; capable of development into actuality.” This concept of potential helps us to understand the spiritual connection between our perfect position with Christ in heaven and our daily practice as Christians on earth. Here is how that connection relates to experiencing victory over sin. The overarching goal of the Christian life is that we become in our daily practice, who we already are in our heavenly position. Because of our union with Christ, that goal, short of sinless perfection, can be a real possibility in our lives, as we are progressively conformed to the image of our Savior. The potential for experiencing such spiritual growth and development exists within every Christian.

However, there is a misunderstanding which can occur as we sincerely embrace this purpose for our individual lives. Realizing our potential in Christ, and growing spiritually as a result, will take place *incrementally*. Simply put, our complete and perfect sanctification in heaven (1 Corinthians 6:11), cannot be fulfilled all at once here on earth (2 Timothy 2:21). Within the Christian realm, we have the “name it and claim it” viewpoint. On a secular level, the practice of “manifesting,” which has its roots in Hinduism, has become very popular. In order to live out our union with Christ successfully, we cannot allow either of the above falsehoods to leak into our understanding of a Romans 6-8 lifestyle. Someone may ask, “Why not? Why not simply believe that we are already perfectly sanctified, and by faith, walk in such a belief?” Because it doesn’t work that way!

There is no Scriptural evidence to support such a notion. The New Testament supports the very opposite perspective. In other words, our spiritual growth as Christians must occur in STAGES; confirmed in 1 Peter 2:1-3, where every convert to Christ begins their life in Christ as a new born baby, who desires the milk of the word, so that we may begin to grow. As that growth takes place, the apostle John tells us in 1 John 2:12-14, that this new born baby will become a little child, then a young man, and finally a father. No amount of faith will be able to circumvent this process. No matter how much we may “name it and claim it,” our spiritual growth, as we obediently live out our union with Christ, must occur incrementally. More often than not, for the vast majority of Christians, including myself, such growth involves taking two steps forward and one step back. Why? Because this is how God has designed it, so that we can learn from our failures. Rather than seeking unbiblical quick fixes, we must trust the process that God has established for each of us.

This is why Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16 to walk by the Spirit; and in Ephesians 4:1, with a walk that is worthy of who we are in Christ. The Christian life is a walk with our Savior. It is not a plane flight. It is a WALK: one step at a time, one day at a time. And it is not a walk in the Garden of Eden. It is a walk in a lost and fallen world which is a far cry from that Paradise lost. But it can be a victorious walk. That spiritual potential exists within every Christian and is clearly confirmed for us in Roman 8:13. There, Paul describes progressive sanctification as “putting to death the deeds of the body.” That expression is rendered in the present tense and active voice; requiring a continuous action, to be repeated on a daily basis. In direct correspondence to Romans 8:13, the apostle Peter amplifies upon that text with a practical application in 2 Peter 1:1-11. First, he reminds us of all the spiritual resources that belong to us in Christ (vv3-4). Then, he exhorts us to make full use of those resources, progressively, in our everyday lives (vv5-7). The contrast established by Paul in Romans 8:13 between the flesh and the Spirit, is repeated by Peter in vv8-9. Verse 8 describes the individual who is realizing their potential in their union with Christ. Verse 9 describes the Christian who is not. I can’t speak for anyone but myself. But my heart’s desire is to be the Christian described by Peter in 2 Peter 1:8. What about you?